

Japanese Americans and Keetley Farms: Utah's Relocation Colony

BY SANDRA C. TAYLOR

"IT WAS DURING THE LATTER DAYS OF March of last year that we suddenly set the date for our departure for Keetley, Wasatch County, Utah. We left Oakland . . . on Saturday afternoon . . . March 28th . . . taking the route via Sacramento. There were twenty one people in

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Above: Fred Wada, center, was the founder of the Japanese American colony at Keetley, Utah. Photograph from Survey Graphics, courtesy of Leonard J. Arrington.

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our group and we traveled in two sedans and three trucks. The latter were loaded with our personal belongings and furnitures. I drove one of the sedans. That night we stopped over at a motel in Truckee, California. It was a very nice and comfortable place, (and incidentally very expensive), and we all slept well. We spent Sunday night at a motor court in Winnemucca, Nevada. I still remember that we had dinner at a Chop Suey place in that town and they charged us fifteen cents for a small dish (not bowl, mind you) of rice . . . and each of us ate two to three (and even four) dishes of them too."¹

Masao Edward Tsujimoto, the author of this statement, was a young man when he and a group of Japanese Americans set out from the Bay Area to farm a valley in the high Wasatch Mountains east of Salt Lake City in early March 1942. They were part of a migration of nearly five thousand people who, prompted by the army's "encouragement" of Japanese resettlement in areas east of the Pacific Coast, sought new homes. Voluntary resettlement was a fleeting attempt at solving the apparent problem posed by the presence of some 110,000 Japanese, citizens and aliens, on the West Coast. From many sectors came demands that Japanese Americans be removed from the coast because of their suspect loyalties and undoubtedly visible ethnicity—an inescapable reminder of the countenances of the enemy that had struck without warning and destroyed the heart of America's Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor.

Few were successful in their attempts to move. Hostility along their travel routes forced many to sleep in their cars and made them desperate for gasoline. Others succeeded in leaving California and crossing Nevada but were unsuccessful in finding new residences and livelihoods in the states of the Intermountain West. Most eventually returned to the West Coast to await relocation to internment camps.

One small group that did succeed, in most unusual circumstances, was a little colony at Keetley, Utah. Its story is to be found in references in local newspapers and in the oral history of its founder, Fred Isamu Wada.² Most interesting, however, is the chronicle of Masao Edward Tsujimoto, who wrote a lengthy document about the group's experiences the first year at Keetley as a letter to a fictitious

¹ Masao Edward Tsujimoto, "A Letter to Ophelia about Keetley Farms," manuscript dated 1943 in the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter cited as Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia").

² Los Angeles County Public Library/Claremont Graduate School Joint Oral History Program, Fred Isamu Wada: *Businessman, Community Leader, and Philanthropist* (Oral History Program, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1984).

friend, Ophelia, a resident of the internment camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. The letter, in reality a forty-page narrative, is a detailed account of Tsujimoto's experiences; it became part of the documentation in the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study, a research project conducted at the University of California during the war.

In order to analyze the success of the Keetley settlement in the light of the overall failure of voluntary relocation, one must set its story in the context of World War II. The shock waves of the disaster at Pearl Harbor quickly reached the many communities of Nikkei, people of Japanese ancestry, who had settled on the West Coast of the United States since the turn of the century. Set apart by their ethnicity, perennial victims of discrimination and prejudice, the Japanese Americans had accepted their inferior status and had worked hard to establish a foothold in the country. They excelled at agriculture, especially small truck gardens, which they made productive even in the most barren of soils. Their very success prompted the jealousy of their neighbors, but despite legislation that had sought to prohibit aliens from owning land in California, the Issei and their American-born offspring, the Nisei, had succeeded in carving a place for themselves.

The war disrupted all that. Although initial fears of the Nikkei that they would be blamed and persecuted for Pearl Harbor were not realized in December 1941, pressure for action against them began to build in the early months of 1942. The findings presented in the secret Munson Report, which related the results of an investigation commissioned by the State Department to determine the loyalty of Japanese residents of the West Coast and Hawaii, had concluded that "there is no Japanese problem"—the people were loyal.³ Despite this, what Roger Daniels has termed "the myth of military necessity" soon prevailed over objections of the Department of Justice, and the wheels were set in motion for the largest peacetime movement of peoples by the federal government in American history.⁴

Although American racism and economic greed provided the backdrop, the military forced the decision to evacuate the Japanese, and the politicians complied. Lt. Gen. J. L. De Witt, in command of

³ Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1976), pp. 33-34.

⁴ Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 71.

the Western Defense Command, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, provost marshal Maj. Gen. Allen W. Gullion, and Maj. Karl R. Bendetsen were the major villains of the piece, but it was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who issued the infamous Executive Order 9066 which authorized relocation. The order was made public on February 20, 1942.⁵

Congress facilitated implementation, complementing the executive order with Public Law 503. DeWitt carried out his task by excluding all people of Japanese origin, aliens and citizens, from the West Coast. At first they were ordered out of an extensive coastal strip deemed "prohibited." Many took refuge in interior communities, only to be ousted again. De Witt then proclaimed the existence of two extensive areas along the coast, Military Areas 1 and 2, which encompassed the western halves of Washington, Oregon, and California, and the southern half of Arizona. Although no orders for mass evacuation were given at that time, the Western Defense Command encouraged Japanese to move from Military Area No. 1 and the California portion of Military Area No. 2. De Witt ordered Bendetsen to "employ all appropriate means to encourage voluntary migration."⁶ Thus, by the first week of March 1942 the stimulus had been provided for resettlement—with virtually no governmental machinery set in place to expedite it.

The number of those who voluntarily sought to move has been determined by the change of address cards that were required of those leaving the two military areas after March 2. According to the findings of the Commission on Wartime Internment and Relocation of Civilians, 2,005 moved between March 2 and 27; and between March 27 and 29, when the voluntary phase ended, about 2,500 more cards were filed. De Witt said that although over 10,000 announced their intentions of moving, only 4,889 actually did. The commission found that of those, 1,963 went to Colorado (whose governor, William Carr, was unique in his hospitality to the unwelcome migrants.), 519 to Utah, 305 to Idaho, 208 to eastern Washington, and the rest elsewhere.⁷ However, for most such action was an impos-

⁵ Jacobus tenBroek, Edward N. Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 103-13. See also the Report of the Commission on Wartime and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 93-94, 101-4.

⁶ U.S. Army, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 41, as cited in tenBroek, *Prejudice*, p. 118.

⁷ *Personal Justice Denied*, p. 104.



Above and below: Two in a series of Burma Shave signs of the 1940s with the message "Slap the Jap with scrap iron." Courtesy of the National Archives.

few, the prohibition after March 29 of travel, and then the "round up" of 110,000 people into assembly centers and from there to the ten concentration camps in the interior.

The situation in Utah was similar to the other Intermountain states. A small Japanese population in the state dated from the census of 1890. The first residents had come to work in the sugar beet industry, on the railroad, and in the coal and copper mines. Some came as converts to the Mormon faith. By 1910 most of the two thousand Japanese worked in the sugar beet industry, although many still worked in the coal mines of Carbon County. After the agricultural depression of the 1920s devastated the sugar beet industry, most Nikkei switched to truck farming and fruit raising, and gradually some people moved to the cities. The census of 1940 revealed a decline of nearly a thousand Japanese from the previous decade's high of 3,269; economic instability had forced many to return to the West Coast.⁸

The Japanese community in Utah had many of the characteristics of minority settlements elsewhere: it was self-contained and self-sufficient, with its own places of worship, shops, and restaurants. If it did not melt into the predominantly Mormon culture around it, neither



sibility; they could not arrange their personal affairs fast enough, they lacked the funds to move on their own, and they did not know where to go, especially when they were overwhelmed by the rumors of local hostility or even mob violence.⁸ Amid growing uncertainty and fear, most elected to wait for the government's next steps: a curfew, the prohibition after March 29 of travel, and then the "round up" of 110,000 people into assembly centers and from there to the ten concentration camps in the interior.

⁸ U.S., Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 26.

⁹ Mamoru Iga, "Acculturation of Japanese Population in Davis County, Utah" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1955); Leonard J. Arrington, "Utah's Ambiguous Reception: The Relocated Japanese Americans," in Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986).

did it cause friction. In fact, Japanese converts had their own ward.

The war and voluntary relocation brought Utah's attention to the so-called Japanese problem. Executive Order 9066 was popular around the country, and Utah was no exception. As historian Leonard Arrington has noted, Utah was not free from discrimination, but it did seem to have avoided the outright hostility that prevailed in California.¹⁰ To Utahns Japanese Americans were "Japs," and while the local community was tolerated, newcomers from the coast were not particularly welcome.

Individual Japanese, however, had been accepted and liked in the communities where they resided, and white residents regretted the impact of the war's dislocations on them. For example, the *Park City Record* noted on March 5, 1942, the suicide of one Ike Kow, who succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning when he was dismissed from his job as a section foreman on the railroad, a position he, an Issei, had held for thirty-five years. The paper reported that he had left his automobile to his loyal housekeeper, and it commented that he was "held in high esteem by the railroad fraternity in Park City."¹¹

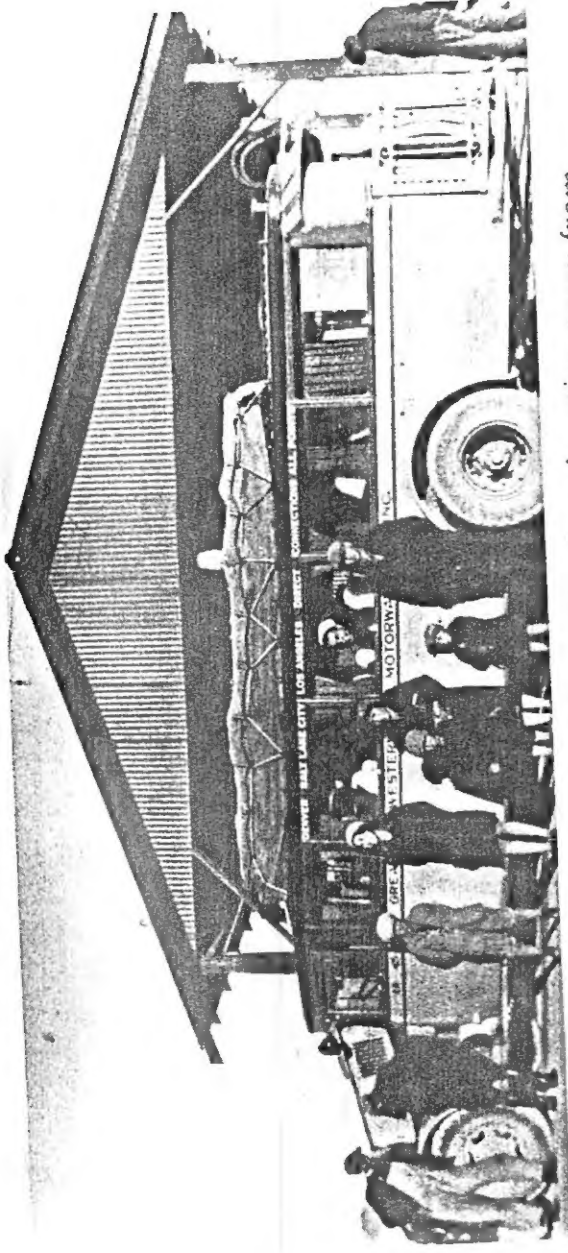
Nevertheless, several thousand Japanese from the West Coast did come to Utah, either passing through on their way farther east or seeking homes here. Even though they met signs saying "No Japs Wanted Here," they persisted. Some got help from the Salt Lake Japanese community; other did not.¹² Of those who settled in Utah, the largest number joined the "Nihonmachi," or Japan town, of Salt Lake City, but it was the tiny settlement of Keetley, midway between Heber City and Park City in the Wasatch Mountains, that became a wartime home to the largest single group to resettle anywhere outside of the West Coast.

Keetley itself was typical of the small towns that dotted the mining districts of Utah. It had begun as a mining shaft, the portage of a drainage tunnel from the Park City Mining District. When rancher George A. Fisher built a town at the site of the Park Utah mine in 1923, he named it after John B. (Jack) Keetley, the supervisor of the drain tunnel project and a former pony express rider. Fisher, appropriately enough, became Keetley's mayor. Life in the small settlement revolved around the mines, for the area was rich in silver,

¹⁰ Arrington, "Utah's Ambiguous Reception."

¹¹ *Park City Record*, March 5, 1942.

¹² Helen Z. Papanikolas and Alice Kasai, "Japanese Life in Utah," *Peoples of Utah*, ed. Helen Z. Papanikolas (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976), p. 353.



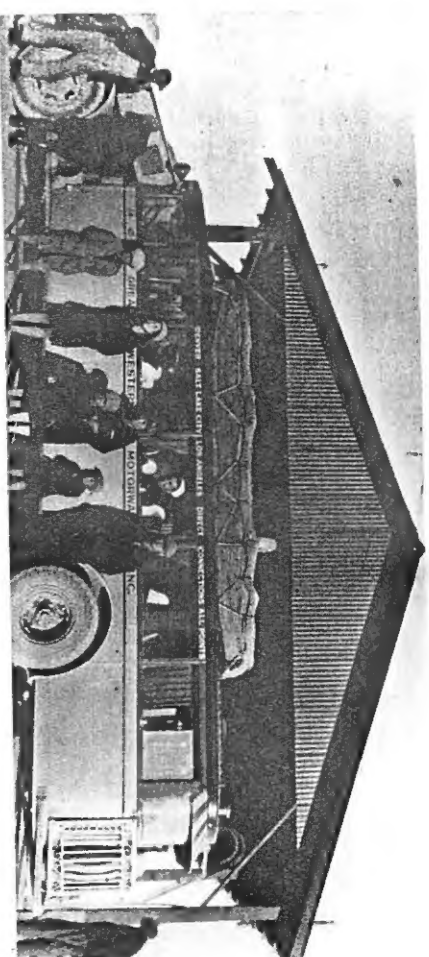
Some Japanese Americans avoided internment by relocating away from the West Coast voluntarily early in 1942. USHS collections, courtesy of Dr. Edward I. Hashimoto.

lead, and zinc. Fisher's fields were fertile, and water from the drain tunnel was available for irrigation. The Union Pacific railroad built a line to the town, and with this stimulus population grew, reaching a high of between five and six hundred in the late 1920s. Fisher himself built five homes and an apartment house for the miners. However, the depression of the 1930s hit the mining industry hard and the town began to decline. Soon it settled into a modest existence, its hundred or so residents profiting from their location on Highway 40, a major interstate route.¹³

When the United States entered World War II the people of Utah quickly felt its impact. While Utah Mormons were not as Japanophobic as their compatriots on the West Coast, they were as outraged by Pearl Harbor as other Americans, and they shared the nation's suspicions about the loyalties of Japanese Americans. In addition, the Mormons had always been chary of in-migrations of non-Mormon groups that might upset the homogeneity of their culture, and they also feared adding to unemployment in the state.¹⁴

However, the war brought a labor shortage, particularly in agriculture, which led to a growing interest in using voluntary migrants from the West Coast as agricultural laborers. In early March the Utah State Farm Bureau Federation met to consider the problem of wartime antipathy. The executive secretary of the federation, Selvoy J. Boyer, suggested that Japanese nationals from the West Coast and local unemployed Japanese could be accepted as farm labor if the state and the army supplied adequate "special policing."¹⁵ Most Utahns adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

When voluntary evacuees arrived early in March 1942, the Japanese American Citizens' League, a Nisei organization founded in 1930, attempted to provide some assistance to those who could not immediately find work. The organization voluntarily registered the refugees and worked with the Utah Welfare Commission to provide assistance.¹⁶ But even this group was wary, lest hostility toward the newcomers jeopardize its own precarious position in the communities of Salt Lake and Ogden. When in the succeeding weeks more Japanese entered Zion the JACL became even more active. Its



Some Japanese Americans avoided internment by relocating away from the West Coast voluntarily early in 1942. USHS collections, courtesy of Dr. Edward I. Hashimoto.

spokesman, Mike Masaoka, visited with Gov. Herbert B. Maw to work out plans for assistance, and the league began to search for areas of the state where the primarily agricultural refugees might find farm work. Despite the JACL's efforts to ease the situation, tensions mounted, and a sociologist at the University of Utah, Elmer R. Smith, made an attempt to achieve harmony by speaking at a public forum to promote ideals of justice and fair play in the community.¹⁷

At this point only a few venturesome Nikkei were moving east, for most could not afford the gamble. It was in this context that the Keetley settlement project originated. Fred Isamu Wada, a prosperous produce dealer from Oakland, traveled to Utah seeking a place to settle his family to avoid internment. Wada, whose wife Masako was from the Ogden area, first visited Roosevelt, in Duchesne County, whose residents had expressed interest in obtaining Japanese farmers to work the land. On his way through the mountains Wada met George Fisher, mayor of Keetley. Wada traveled on to Duchesne, but concluded that although the reception he received there was very hospitable, the town's location was too remote from the railroad to provide access to markets for produce. He returned to Keetley and struck a deal with Fisher, who wanted laborers for his land. Wada gave Fisher a down payment of \$500 to lease some 3,500 acres, and the mayor agreed to visit the Bay Area to see how Wada was regarded in Oakland. If Fisher remained

¹³ Leslie S. Ray, *Under Wasatch Skies: A History of Wasatch County, 1858-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1954), pp. 30-32; Wasatch County Daughters of Utah Pioneers, *How Beautiful upon the Mountains* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1963), pp. 1109-16.

¹⁴ Arrington, "Utah's Ambiguous Reception."

¹⁵ *Deseret News*, March 3, 1942.

¹⁶ *Deseret News*, March 6, 1942.

¹⁷ *Deseret News*, March 17 and 18, 1942.

enthusiastic, Wada would then lease the land and move a group of Japanese Americans to Keetley.¹⁸

When the news of Fisher's offer reached the residents of Wasatch and Summit counties they were outraged.¹⁹ Even before the announcement of the project county officials had expressed their opposition to the arrival of any West Coast Japanese, and Park City residents reacted with unanimous opposition. The city council passed a resolution condemning Fisher's offer: "If twenty-five or thirty Japanese families were brought into this district, in a short period living standards will be lowered. . . . Since we are at war with Japan this would cause much dissension among the citizens of the community. . . ." The good citizens of Park City went on record urging the governor to do "everything in his power" to stop Fisher's plan.²⁰

Residents of Heber City were equally dismayed. They met with Governor Maw to voice their opposition to the movement of any Japanese, alien or citizen, to the state. Maw had earlier met Fred Wada and had told him that he would allow Japanese to settle only in counties that approved it—and only Duchesne County had.²¹ Although Fisher had indicated that he would only accept "citizen Japanese" and that he could provide them with adequate culinary water as well as housing,²² most local residents were apparently not appeased.

Despite this local opposition, Nikkei refugees from the coast were not totally unwelcome in Utah, as Duchesne's attempts to attract them suggest. Wada had been very convincing; Duchesne residents still hoped to bring in agricultural workers, and the county commissioner announced on March 27 that the people of his county considered it a "matter of patriotic duty" to accept refugees. However, their isolation did not attract the displaced California Japanese.²³

Fisher's trip to California convinced him of Fred Wada's integrity, and at that point Wada began to recruit colonists. He decided to make the colony a nonprofit cooperative enterprise. The

people he recruited had various personal reasons for joining. One feared being returned to Japan to the navy he had deserted; others had retarded or handicapped children and did not want to take them to a camp. None were well off; the rich could not abandon their possessions so quickly. The colonists pooled their machinery and wares and contributed some cash to the enterprise. Wada paid Fisher \$7,500 of his own money to lease the land and its abandoned buildings. Wada, incidentally, lost everything else that he owned in Oakland when he, his wife, and three children departed.²⁴

Wada's little group left California for Keetley on March 26, 1942. By the last week of March fifteen families had reached Utah. They were followed by a few more from San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, and Santa Barbara.²⁵ Former Salt Lake resident Frank Endo was among the settlers; he brought not only his twelve brothers and sisters and their families but also food and goods from Oakland.²⁶ The one hundred thirty Keetley colonists arrived just in time: on March 30 the army's freeze order went into effect. There would be no more voluntary resettlement.

Tsujimoto's account of the Wada party's trek to Keetley reflects the excitement of his youth. According to him, the residents had no trouble crossing the desert to reach Utah. He described the patriotic motives of Wada, who was his brother's brother-in-law. Wada's two brothers had enlisted in military service, but since family obligations kept him at home, Fred had decided to find some unused land, and, as Tsujimoto put it, "try to break all records at raising crops, without costing Uncle Sam a red cent." Wanting to avoid becoming a ward of the government, Wada intended to raise food for freedom.²⁷ He considered settling in Keetley preferable to going to camp, but he related much later how shocked the settlers were when the snow melted and they saw the inhospitable soil they had contracted to farm.²⁸ "When I first saw it the snow had leveled everything. When the snow melted it was all hilly with rocks and sagebrush. Hell, we had to move fifty tons of rocks to clear 150 acres to farm."²⁹

¹⁸ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

¹⁹ Papanikolas and Kasai, "Japanese Life," p. 353; *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 19 and 22, 1942; *Wasatch Wave* (Heber City), March 20, 1942.

²⁰ *Park City Record*, March 19, 1942.

²¹ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, p. 46.

²² *Wasatch Wave*, March 20, 1942.

²³ *Wasatch Wave*, March 27, 1942.

²⁴ Galen Fisher, "Japanese Colony: Success Story," *Survey Graphic* (February 1943): 41-43; Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 50-54, 58.

²⁵ *Wasatch Wave*, April 3, 1942.

²⁶ Papanikolas and Kasai, "Japanese Life," p. 354.

²⁷ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

²⁸ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 54-59.

²⁹ *A Tribute to Fred Isamu Wada*, published privately by Omni Bank, Los Angeles, November 14, 1984.

Although Fisher and Wada emphasized their patriotic goals, a few local residents still opposed them. No sooner had the Japanese Americans settled in Fisher's dwellings than local mine workers tossed a stick of dynamite from a car at a shed adjacent to their lodgings. No one was hurt, but the incident had wide repercussions. It prompted Governor Maw to urge caution; he announced that he planned to attend a meeting of the governors of the ten western states the following week in Salt Lake City to discuss the resettlement of West Coast Japanese. Maw called the Keetley incident an example of what could happen if Japanese settled in areas where they were not wanted and had no federal supervision. Although he decried Fisher's irresponsibility in bringing Wada's group in without first gaining community support, Maw urged local residents to show a "humanitarian attitude" toward the newcomers, whom he called "for the most part good people."³⁰ Privately, he had told Wada to take the group back to California, but Wada ignored him.³¹

To young Tsujimoto even the act of violence was an aberration. He reported to "Ophelia" that even though the local residents had not been anxious for their arrival, one family had been kind to them; the husband, a naval reserve officer, had become acquainted with Japanese Americans when he was stationed on the West Coast. The other residents' coolness stemmed only from their never having known Japanese Americans before, Tsujimoto told Ophelia. Although the dynamite blast and the one that followed it a few nights later were meant to intimidate them, there had been no further signs of hostility. In fact, he wrote, "as time passed by, we became more and more friendlier with our neighbors." He described how the Japanese boys had started playing baseball and basketball after work with the white youths of Keetley; they were then invited to the birthday party of one of the boys. When his mother asked her son how he liked playing with "those Jap boys," he responded, "They're not Jap boys . . . we're all Americans."³²

Instead of publicizing the violence, the *Park City Record* featured a story two weeks later about how happy the new settlers were in their homes. The paper cited Fisher's remark that "those who doubt the sincerity of the Japanese Americans in support of the war

³⁰ *Deseret News*, March 31, 1942. Wada identified the bombers as local mine workers; Oral History, Fred Isamu Wada, p. 46.

³¹ Oral History, Fred Isamu Wada, p. 66.

³² Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

effort do not truly understand the situation. . . . They are not only willing, but eager to help." The article stressed that the migrants had come at their own expense, and it concluded by emphasizing Fisher's view that local residents had received them favorably.³³ It appeared that the tide had turned, and Keetley's new residents had been accepted.

Within the next few months relations continued to improve. The *Park City Record* reported that Fisher had addressed the local Kiwanis Club in late May—an indication that he had not been ostracized for his Japanese initiative. Fisher proudly told the gathering that the Salt Lake YMCA had commended him for the fine work he was doing with "these people" and hoped he would continue since "proper understanding" was most necessary. The mayor of Keetley told the Kiwanians that the Japanese were certainly better off producing food than they would be "if herded in a concentration camp . . . costing taxpayers a thousand dollars a day."³⁴ A month later the *Park City* paper carried a story from the *Salt Lake Telegram* which, it said, had run nearly a page of illustrations on the activities at Keetley, including pictures of Fred Wada with the superintendent of the New Park Mining company. The *Telegram* reported that the new residents had had no trouble with their neighbors, who had gradually accepted them. The Japanese Americans hoped to pay off their lease and to show a profit; their children, meanwhile, planned to enter the local schools in the fall. A flag flying at Keetley junction proclaimed the group's motto: "Food for Freedom."³⁵

The Japanese first busied themselves repairing the abandoned buildings in which they resided. Once the spring snow began to melt they cleared the sagebrush from the land, dug out the rocks by hand, and then began to plant a large truck garden with lettuce and strawberries. They raised chickens (which they quickly ate) and pigs and goats. The two experienced farmers among them directed the work. But the season was short; snow fell again on September 9.³⁶

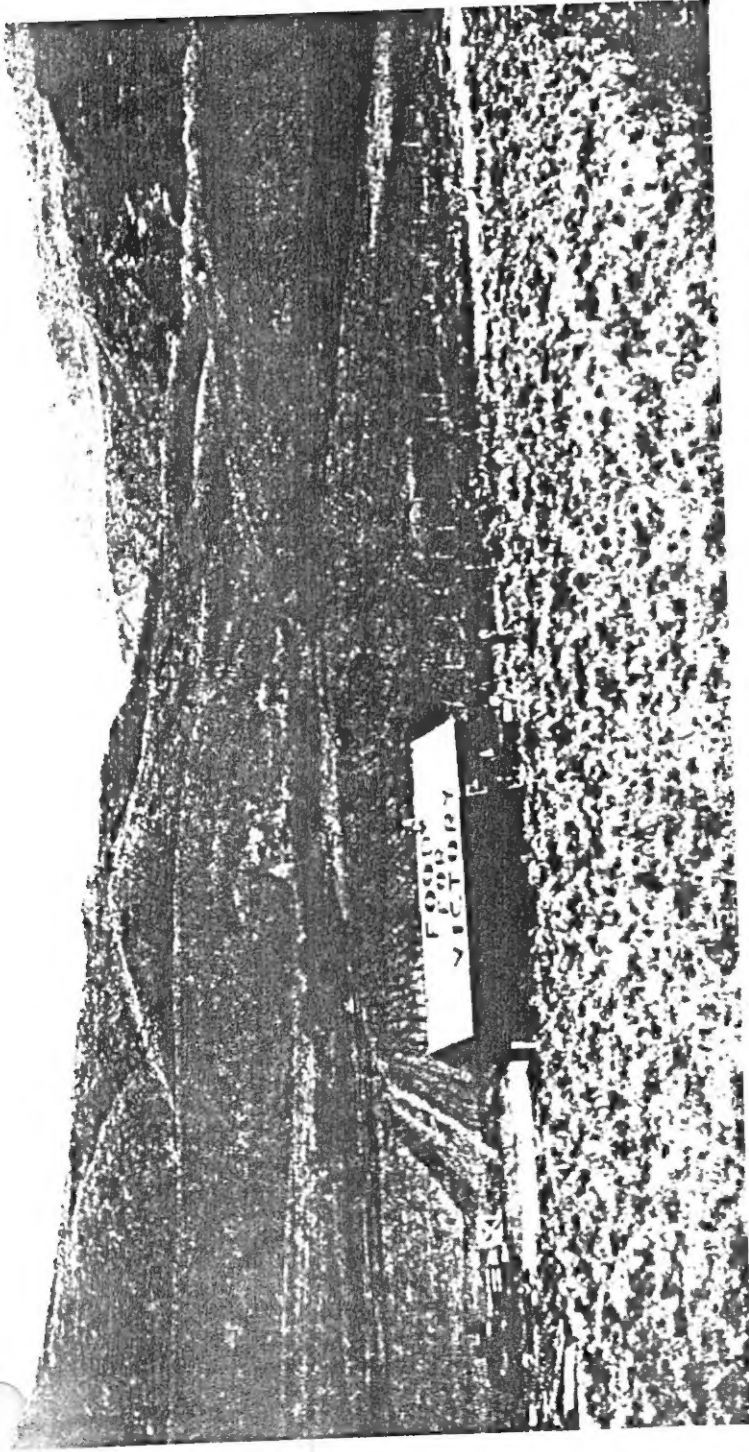
Although the farmers toiled seven days a week, there were other activities too. The first thing they had built was a large Japanese bath for the tub Wada had hauled from California. The women knitted

³³ *Park City Record*, April 16, 1942.

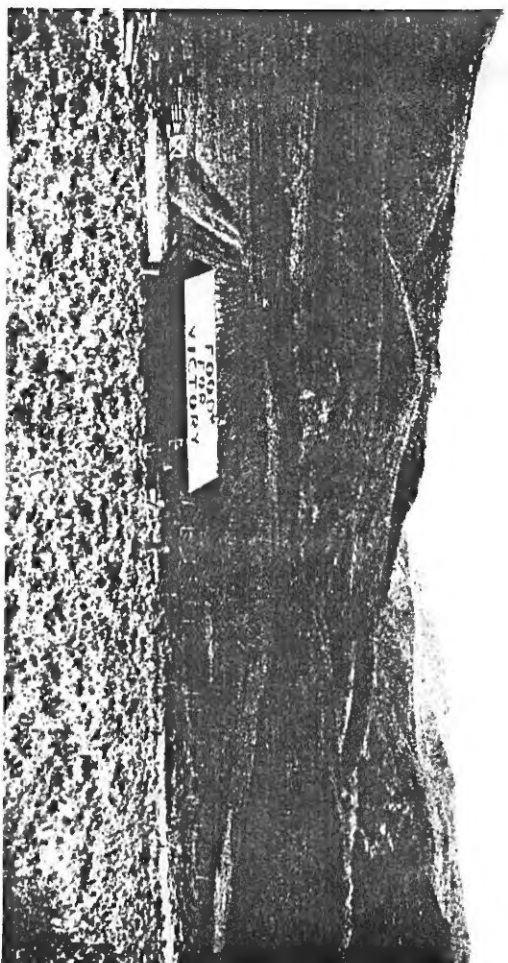
³⁴ *Park City Record*, May 21, 1942.

³⁵ *Park City Record*, June 25, 1942.

³⁶ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia." Oral History, Fred Isamu Wada, p. 68.



"Food for Victory" was the patriotic slogan of the Japanese Americans raising vegetables in Keetley, Utah. Photograph from Survey Graphics, courtesy of Leonard J. Arrington.



"Food for Victory" was the patriotic slogan of the Japanese Americans raising vegetables in Keetley, Utah. Photograph from Survey Graphics, courtesy of Leonard J. Arrington.

socks for the soldiers with the "wife of a very prominent Heber City physician." Some attended church services provided by the Reverend Edward White of Park City. After White left for Wyoming they were visited by Galen W. Fisher of Berkeley, a prominent Congregationalist who knew Wada and had long supported Japanese Americans; the Reverend Ernest Chapman and a Reverend Ota of Salt Lake City; and the Reverend Arnold Katsuo Nakajima, formerly of the Bay Area. Some of the children attended the Mormon church in Heber City, where they learned the tenets of Mormonism and its history.³⁷

As time passed, the composition of the community changed. Some of the men who had been interned by the Justice Department at the outbreak of the war were released to join their families; among these new arrivals was Tsujimoto's father. When girls graduated from high school they left for Salt Lake City to take jobs as domestics, and a group of about thirty residents moved to Sandy, south of Salt Lake City, to begin their own farming project in the warmer valley. Occasionally, soldiers on leave would visit their families at Keetley, including Tsujimoto's elder brother, Katsumi, now a sergeant.³⁸

A further sign of the community's acceptance was a visit in late May of a reporter and a photographer from Salt Lake City. The June 6 issue of the *Salt Lake Telegram* featured a picture story of Wada's colony, and the *Park City Record* printed excerpts a week later.³⁹ To Tsujimoto the pictures themselves were the occasion for even more good humor. He sent them to his brother in the army in Texas, and one of his buddies, seeing pictures of attractive women, asked Tsujimoto to arrange correspondence between them. The youthful author giggled over the fact that the soldier had picked a married woman.⁴⁰

The men of Keetley had to be enterprising, for the Fisher farm was unable to support them all. They farmed and harvested the ranchlands, but they also contracted to work on a sugar beet ranch near Spanish Fork. They labored there during the week, leaving the women and children to tend the Keetley crops. Resident Ted Nagata recalled how hard the work was and how much effort he put into the task to uphold the honor of the Keetley group and to prove to the others that he was not a young weakling. Six or seven men also worked on a seventy-five-acre fruit orchard and produce farm in Orem, where they helped raise fruit, raspberries, and truck garden vegetables.⁴¹

Those who remained in Keetley were intensely busy during the summer months. Tsujimoto recounted how "every day white farmers came to Keetley" to ask for help with the harvest; although they were already short-handed, they helped out when they could. Even the young children helped with berries and vegetables. The first year the crop was good, and the Keetley farmers not only supplied local needs and those of Salt Lake City but also shipped goods as far as the Topaz relocation camp. The hills around were leased out for the raising of cattle (a sheep-raising project was vetoed by Fisher), and they kept milk cows whose output was sold to the Hi-Land Dairy in Murray. They kept the irrigation ditches free of weeds to conserve the precious water, and the boys complained mightily about the deer flies and ticks. As fall set in they were busy harvesting and canning their crops, instructed in the latter task by the Mormon cooperative in Heber City.⁴²

³⁹ *Salt Lake Telegram*, June 6, 1942; *Park City Record*, June 25, 1942.

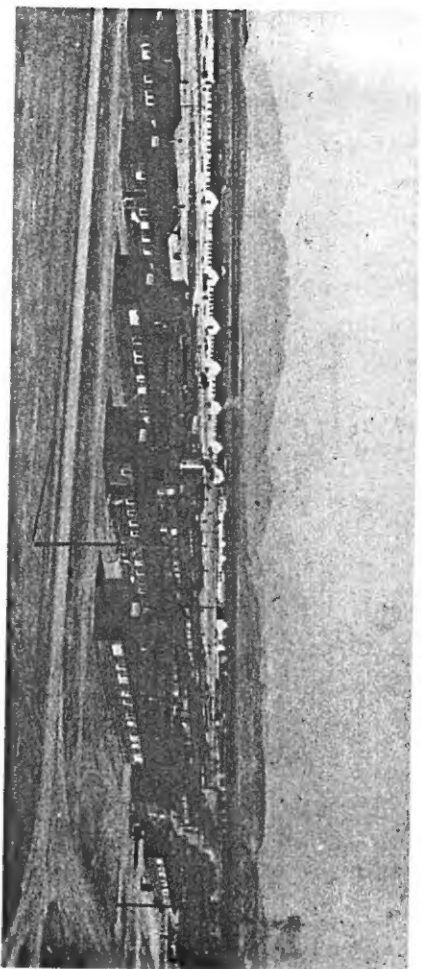
⁴⁰ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

⁴¹ Information from Ted Nagata; Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

⁴² Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

³⁷ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

³⁸ *Ibid.*



The northeast corner of Topaz, Utah, with the hospital and military police barracks in the background. Photograph courtesy of Leonard J. Arrington.

In September the first residents of the Tanforan Assembly Center, south of San Francisco, were moved to the Topaz relocation center at Delta. The Keetley community was happy to have friends and relatives so near; the internees included one of Tsujimoto's brothers. Keetley residents visited the camp many times. Tsujimoto commented only that he now knew what life must be like at Heart Mountain where his friend was interned. Gradually some of the residents of the camps at Topaz, Grenada, Minidoka, and Manzanar who were furloughed for agricultural work came through the Keetley colony on their way to other farms.⁴³ Wada's impressions of internment were harsh; he thought most internees lazy for not wishing to join him, and he recollected that they all sat around being entertained and fed.⁴⁴

The games and frolics of summer soon passed. Although many members of the Keetley group had been strangers when they came to Utah, they were now becoming close friends. But they were not without their own divisions. Tsujimoto told his friend how they had sent a "poor Kibei sucker" out into the woods with a sack to "hunt for snipe," and he stayed out half the night before catching onto the practical joke.⁴⁵ Kibei, educated in Japan, often got along poorly with the very American Nisei. But aside from such jokes, the community was harmonious.

When winter came, those who had been farming elsewhere returned to Keetley for the winter. But idleness meant no income, so some took odd jobs and some went to work in the mines. Wada persuaded the army to permit the employment of Keetley Japanese in defense jobs in Salt Lake City. They also got fingerling trout from Sen. Abe Murdock, which they raised.⁴⁶

The children, meanwhile, enjoyed playing in the snow, ice skating, and skiing—new sports for the former Californians. Others played basketball, joining the Salt Lake JACL. All the children attended school, some in Heber City, some in Park City. Tsujimoto noted that "here in Wasatch County the Nisei kids get along and associate a lot with their white classmates." However, he noted that the group in Sandy had not been so well received. A Nisei high school basketball player there was asked to leave the team "due to public sentiment." Tsujimoto commented, "I'm sure that no such incidents will ever happen at Wasatch High School here." As winter passed, Tsujimoto looked forward to spring and another season of raising "Food for Freedom."⁴⁷

Keetley's agricultural enterprises met with mixed success. They could raise lettuce and other truck vegetables, but the cost of transporting them to Salt Lake was high. The second year they raised rutabagas, potatoes, and onions, but the cost of bags was more than the price paid by the army for these crops. An attempt to raise hogs failed when the animals all died of disease. The residents were able to provide for their own needs, except for meat and staples, but the community had its greatest success as a way-station, a stopping point for people in transit from their West Coast homes or the camps to other destinations.⁴⁸

Keetley provided a sharp contrast to the camp at Topaz, 135 miles to the southwest, where several thousand less fortunate people of Japanese ancestry spent the war years.⁴⁹ Although Wada disparaged the lack of initiative of the Topaz internees, internment was hard on incentive. Many did leave for work elsewhere, but others feared the hostility of the white community. The residents of Keetley were entrepreneurs who were able to profit from their adversity. They rose above local racism, established themselves in rural Utah, and at

⁴³ Ibid.; additional information from Ted Nagata.

⁴⁴ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

⁴⁶ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 64-66; Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

⁴⁷ Tsujimoto, "Letter to Ophelia."

⁴⁸ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 73-75.

⁴⁹ On Topaz, see Leonard J. Arrington, *The Price of Prejudice* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1962).

least broke even. They did not want to be a burden and were not.⁵⁰

When the war ended, the members of the Keetley colony remained to harvest the crop. About two-thirds of them then returned to their former homes in California, while one-third remained in Utah, joining the resident community, which was also augmented by some former Topaz residents. The 1950 census listed an increase of 1,183 Japanese American residents in the state.

The Keetley colony's residents scattered. Skip Tabata had come to Salt Lake City in the winter of 1944 to look for work; he remained to do gardening and eventually got into automobile mechanics at Strong Motors. He courted Mary Yamada, whom he had met at Keetley, and brought her back from California to be his wife.⁵¹ Fred Wada was offered a position working for the American government in Japan, but he decided to return to California; his family settled in the mild climate of Los Angeles. He entered the wholesale produce market again and soon owned his own market, beginning again what would become a very successful career in the produce business. Wada became a member of the Harbor Commission, supported the Olympics and was active in the production of the 1984 Olympic Games, and after his retirement from the produce business became chairman of Japanese Health Enterprises, owning and operating four nursing homes for Issei.⁵² Masao Edward Tsujimoto returned to San Francisco where he became a pharmacist. His sister Ruth married Harry T. Hasegawa and remained in Salt Lake City. The white residents of Keetley continued their prewar pattern of life, that of a sleepy little rural town. George Fisher remained mayor until his death in 1952; that same year the post office was discontinued when the postmaster of twenty-eight years died.⁵³ In the 1980s Keetley is little more than a road sign.

The legacy of Keetley remains, however, testimony to the fact that some Japanese Americans could overcome the iniquities of relocation. They survived in alien surroundings and lived among their white neighbors in harmony. Park City residents overcame their racism and suspicions and accepted them. A small victory, perhaps, yet an important component in Utah's multiracial heritage.

⁵⁰ Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 74-76, 82.

⁵¹ Interview with Skip Tabata, Salt Lake City, November 1984.

⁵² Papanikolas and Kasai, "Japanese Life," p. 359; Oral History, *Fred Isamu Wada*, pp. 83-87; letter to author from Fred I. Wada, February 19, 1985.

⁵³ Daughters of Utah Pioneers, *How Beautiful upon the Mountains*, p. 1116.



A Utahn Abroad: Parley P. Christensen's World Tour, 1921-23

BY JOHN R. SILLITO

POLITICALLY SPEAKING, UTAH TODAY IS one of the most conservative states in the nation, as its high vote totals for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984 attest. Notwithstanding contemporary reality, a radical left-wing minority has always been a little-known yet real part of

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Above: Parley P. Christensen. Courtesy of author.